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The Dedication Feast in the Old Testament

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IN the first two Books of Maccabees are given parallel accounts of the institution by Judas Maccabee of a feast of Dedication¹ commemorative of the purgation of the temple after its defilement by "the Abomination of Desolation" reared by Antiochos Epiphanes, and its rededication to the worship of the Lord.² That defilement had taken place on the 25th Kislev (corresponding to our December), in the year 168 B.C.³ It was on the very same day three years later that the fresh dedication took place.

This same feast of the Dedication is the subject of the two "Epistles of the Jews in Jerusalem" to their brethren in Alexandria, which preface the Second Book of Maccabees (1 1-9; 1 10-2 18). In them the Egyptian Diaspora is exhorted to the due observance of the feast. These "epistles" are generally acknowledged to be late and spurious additions, but they are among the early witnesses to the interest in the celebration of that feast. In the Hebrew Old Testament a solitary reference to a feast of Dedication is found, in the title of Ps. 30 שִׁיר חֲנֻכַּת הַבַּיִת, "Ode of the Dedication of the House"; unfortunately it is difficult to find any point of contact between this Psalm and what we know or may suppose of a dedication feast, and we must deny to this title any authority as an original witness to the use of the Psalm. Finally, for the New Testament, there is the unique reference to the feast in Jn. 10 22.

¹ The Greek words used for the feast are *ἐγκαίνια*, *ἐγκαίνισμός*, *ἐγκαίνιασμός*, words of Septuagintal origin and representing the Hebrew root חֲנֻכָּה.

² 1 Mac. 4 36-59, 2 Mac. 10 1-8; cf. Josephus, *AJ*, xii. 7 6 f.

³ 1 Mac. 1 41-64, 2 Mac. 6 1-11; cf. *AJ*, xii. 5 4.

It is not my present purpose to refer to the later history of this feast of Ḥanukka, which has become one of the most festive in the Jewish calendar.⁴ Two points may be noted in respect to its observance from early times. In the first place the new celebration was modeled after the feast of Booths, being celebrated with an eight-day period; so 2 Mac. 10 6: "With joy they celebrated eight days after the manner of Tabernacles," while in the first "Epistle," 1 9, the festival is called "the days of the feast of Tabernacles (σκηνοπηγία) of the month Kislev," and in vs. 18, simply σκηνοπηγία. As at Tabernacles, the boughs of trees were carried in the procession, 2 Mac. 10 7, and the same Hallel collection (Pss. 113–118) was sung at both festivals. The other point in the celebration is the illumination of the temple and of private houses. Josephus is our earliest explicit authority for this custom; "We celebrate this festival and call it Lights (φῶτα)," he says.⁵ But without doubt the second "Epistle" prefacing 2 Mac. refers to the same practice with its legend of Nehemia's miraculous recovery of the sacred fire through the use of "the thick water," which was the residue of the deposit of the holy fire hidden away upon the destruction of the first temple. Hence, in an unfortunately corrupt passage, 1 18, the readers are bidden to "celebrate (the feast) of Tabernacles and of the Fire,"—the legend connected with the latter being then given. With this legend goes the parallel story found in the Talmudic treatise *Shabbath*, 21 *b*, to the effect that the Gentiles defiled all the holy oils, and that the Hasmonæan family found only one flask of the sacred oil, which, however, miraculously supplied the purposes of the sanctuary for eight days; the following year they made a permanent observance of those eight days, "with Hallel and thanksgiving." This anecdote is connected with the elaborate discussion over the number and series of lights that should be used at Ḥanukka.

⁴ For the literature, see Schürer, *Gesch. d. jüd. Volkes*⁴, i, p. 209. For the modern observance, see *Jewish Encyclopædia*, s.v. *Hanuccah*; T. Schärf, *Das gottesdienstliche Jahr der Juden* (Leipzig, 1902), p. 92.

⁵ *AJ*, xii. 7 7.

The only suggestion that has been made concerning the origins of this feast of the Dedication, apart from the historical traditions and legends of Maccabees, Josephus, and the Talmud, is that which would connect this feast with the nature festival of the winter solstice. Wellhausen has propounded this view,⁶ and suggests that, for the sake of giving this popular solar celebration historical justification, the anniversary of the rededication of the temple was established in that season, the connecting link between these two distinct celebrations being the return of the sacred fire. Also E. G. King in his commentary on the Psalms⁷ takes the same viewpoint in his discussion of Ps. 30, the Proper Psalm for Hanukka, but with the very different purpose of finding a mystical meaning in that feast.

Wellhausen's theory is attractive, but we should observe caution in too easily replacing the historical explanation of the usually trustworthy Book of Maccabees with one drawn from the sphere of comparative religion. There is no reason to doubt that the anniversary of the 25th Kislev was that of a historic event. There might have been a slight change of dates to identify the ecclesiastical and the secular celebration. This suggestion may serve to explain the discrepancy in 1 Mac. 1 between vss. 54 and 59, the former dating the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation on the 15th Kislev, the latter placing the beginning of sacrifices at the desecrated altar on the 25th Kislev, the received day for Hanukka. We might then suppose that the true date of the profanation was the 15th, but that the rededication three years later was adapted to the solstitial feast. However, the commentators generally agree that 15 in the former passage is a mistake for 25.

But, so far as the present writer knows, no attempt has been made to trace an ancient lineage for this Maccabæan feast of the Dedication in the earlier history of the temple in Jerusalem. We have no direct reference to the keeping of such an anniversary, but we possess the record of more

⁶ *Israelitische und jüdische Geschichte*⁴, p. 260, n. 3.

⁷ *The Psalms* (Cambridge, 1898), i. p. 126.

than one dedication date, proving that there was at least the basis for anniversary festivals of this kind. According to 1 Ki. 8 2 Solomon dedicated (חנך) his temple with a great festival "in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month," *i.e.* Tishri, and in vs. 65 we are told that "at that time Solomon celebrated the *Hag*" (החג), *i.e.* the great autumnal harvest feast. The Chronicler (2, 7 8 ff.) very clumsily introduces the idea of a double celebration, a week for the dedication and a week for the *Hag*.⁸ The reason why the Chronicler objected to having the Dedication synchronize exactly with the *Hag* was doubtless the ecclesiastical motive to obtain the consecration of the temple as a preliminary to the celebration of the stated feasts; also, as we shall see, another season was probably used in his time for the Dedication festival. Again, it is interesting to notice that, despite the legendary nature of the record, the account of Jeroboam's institution of his schismatic worship at Bethel, 1 Ki. 12 32 ff., also makes the ceremony of dedication correspond with the great autumn feast. That is, it was proper for a dedication feast to fall on the great festival that marked the תפוקת השנה, the epoch that marked the end of the old year and the beginning of the new.

Another temple dedication occurred after the Exile. "The dedication of the house of God" by the returned exiles appears, according to the mind of the compiler of Ezra-Nehemia, to have taken place at the beginning of the month Nisan, for this joyful event is placed (Ezra 6 16) immediately after the completion of the house in the month Adar, the twelfth month, and before the Passover celebration on the 14th of the first month. This date for the Dedication corresponds with the datum of the Priest Code that the original Tent of Meeting was dedicated, through the descent of the Glory of Yahwe, in the first month, Ex. 40 1. 17. Now this appointment of the dedication of the second temple in the spring agreed with the Jewish ecclesiastical calendar, which followed the Babylonian order of months; the

⁸ The same thing appears at the end of 1 Ki. 8 65, but is a late gloss from Chron.

ecclesiastical year now began in Nisan. The principle still remained the same that a dedication festival should take place at the turn of the year.⁹

If we may assume that this dedication in the beginning of Nisan was celebrated with an anniversary festival, at once there is suggested the similarity with the great Zag-muk feast at Babylon, at which on the 1st Nisan the gods Marduk and Nebo celebrated New Year's Day by mutual visits.¹⁰ And I am inclined to think that this Babylonian festival was of the nature of a dedication anniversary. We have the drama of the deity leaving his temple and returning to it, which would be reminiscent of the original installation of his worship in the place.

To go somewhat farther afield, we find that the Roman religion laid stress upon the birthday, the *dies natalis*, of the temples of the gods. These anniversaries were carefully observed on their respective days, and tradition assumed to have exact knowledge of the year and day of the founding of the shrines,¹¹ nor is there reason to doubt the correctness of these traditions. The most distinguished of this category of festivals was that of the Capitoline Jupiter, celebrated on the Ides of September, which was the *dies natalis* of his temple on the Capitoline hill, the acme of the celebration being the *epulum Iovis*, a feast at which the father of the gods and his *paredroi* Juno and Minerva participated in the visible form of their simulacra along with the magistrates and the senate.¹² Fowler argues that this special date was chosen for the celebration, which was also characterized by

⁹ According to Ezra 3, the first altar built by the returned exiles was inaugurated in the seventh month; this then would be the survival of the older use.

¹⁰ See Zimmern, *KAT*³, p. 370, and Zum bab. Neujahrsfest in *Berichte d. Sächs. Ges. d. Wissensch. z. Leipzig*, Philolog.-hist. Klasse, lviii (1906), p. 126.

¹¹ See Wissowa, in Müller's *Handbuch d. Klass. Altertumswissenschaft*, v. pp. 405 f.; E. Aust, *De ædibus sacris populi Romani*, Marburg, 1889. In the latter interesting monograph out of 112 temples listed only 24 have no "birth-days" recorded for them, and of the 50 oldest ones (to 200 B.C.) only 6.

¹² Aust, in Roscher's *Lexicon*, col. 735 f.; Fowler, *Roman Festivals*, pp. 215 ff.

popular games, because the summer's work was then over, and there was leisure to attend to the relaxation of religion. The Capitoline feast thus recalls the great *Hag* celebrated on Zion in the autumn, the same season of the year, when the work was all over, and suggests that in the Hebrew feast as in that of Jupiter dedicatory elements were present. Again, it has been remarked that the year of the dedication of the Capitoline temple is the earliest certain date in the history of Rome,¹³ and the same may be approximately said of the founding of Solomon's temple. The Old Testament historian makes that event the epoch marking the conclusion of an elder age and the beginning of the new, 1 Ki. 6 1, and with this goes the fact that the earliest extra-biblical chronological datum with regard to Hebrew history has respect to the building of the temple: Josephus records that according to the Tyrian annals the temple was founded 143 years and 8 months before the founding of Carthage, *i.e.* 968.¹⁴ A new era may have been instituted with the dedication of the temple, and the anniversary feast would have indicated the successive New Year Days.¹⁵

The argument so far has brought out the facts that there was a motive in the choice of the season of dedication, and that the date as coinciding with the most important epoch in the natural year lent itself to an anniversary celebration. The religion of Rome presents the custom of dedicatory anniversaries, celebrating historical events, and it is plausible to assume that the equally historical event of Solomon's dedication of the temple was remembered from year to year. Is there any material in the Old Testament pointing to the ritual of such an occasion?

There is a body of literature in the Old Testament whose bearing upon the study of the Hebrew ritual has by no means

¹³ Aust, *Lexicon*, col. 707.

¹⁴ *C. Ap.* 1 17; according to § 18 his authority would seem to be Menander of Ephesus.

¹⁵ The Jewish New Year's Day was celebrated on the 1st of the seventh month, but there is reason to believe that earlier it was celebrated on the 10th (see Nowack, *Archäologie*, ii. p. 158). Earlier still it may have been coincident with the full moon, the time of the *Hag*.

been exhausted. I refer to the Psalter, and would offer the hypothesis that at least two of its Psalms bear witness to the existence of an anniversary dedication festival. The Psalms in question are the 24th and the 68th.

To consider the former first, we recall that most commentators make the Psalm — at least vss. 7 ff. — commemorative of some event of dedication. Thus Ewald, Hengstenberg, Briggs, and others connect the Psalm, or its second half, with David's introduction of the ark into his new capital, 2 Sam. 6; De Wette and Hupfeld with the dedication of Solomon's temple. Theodore of Mopsuestia refers it to the return of the Lord at the head of the exiles.¹⁶ Graetz, followed conjecturally by Gunkel in his genial *Ausgewählte Psalmen*, suggests that the Psalm celebrates the return of the ark from a victorious war; Gunkel also advances as an alternate possibility that it is an ode for an annual feast. Duhm, ruthlessly following his prejudice for the late dating of the Psalter, connects its composition with the Maccabæan festival of the Dedication. The dedicatory character of the Psalm is thus pretty generally recognized. My own hypothesis is that it was a liturgical hymn sung at the annual dedication feast of Solomon's temple, which coincided with the autumnal *Hag*. There is no essential objection to the view that David composed the Psalm,¹⁷ or that it was composed for this or that specific historical event. But the history of hymnology shows that liturgical compositions rarely if ever go back to the original occasion of a celebration; only after a festival has existed for a long time, does it come to be celebrated by hymns. Who, for instance, would think of carrying our Christmas and Easter hymns back to the apostolic age? The general fruitlessness of all attempts to find historical references in the Psalms is due to the ignoring of the fact that ritual odes are composed with reference primarily to the feast, only indirectly to the historical event celebrated.

What may have been the nature of such an annual dedi-

¹⁶ Cited by Baethgen, *ad loc.*

¹⁷ Except that "the ancient gates" would rather imply those of the temple than of the city.

catory festival? We might expect it to be the dramatic reproduction of the original act whereby the deity took possession of his house. What this was in Zion we know, — the solemn installation of the ark in the new temple. The anniversary ceremony would then have consisted of a solemn service in which the same ark was taken out of its shrine, carried in procession about the sacred precincts, and then returned to its resting place.¹⁸ Psalm 24 presents just such a ritual. The one objection to the theory is that we never learn of the removal of the ark from the temple after its lodgment there by Solomon. To which it may be replied that we hear almost nothing of the ark from that event until we come to the late reference in Jer. 3 16 ff., when the ark has been irretrievably lost. An obscure passage in 2 Chron. 35 3 may best be explained by supposing that up to Josia's reformation it was the priests' wont to take out the ark on stated occasions, for the reforming king gives the order: "Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon . . . built; it (?) shall be no more a burden on the shoulder." The text is obscure, but is more than usually explicit for a matter which must have been a stumbling-block to the orthodox Chronicler.

If with Cheyne¹⁹ and Duhm the Psalm is assigned to the post-exilic age, we are at a loss to explain the objectivity of its ritual reference; God himself is in the procession, represented by some surrogate, as truly as a victor rides in his triumph. And while later ages, Jewish or Protestant, may be content to interpret this presence of Deity spiritually, it would be a truer canon in our study of Old Testament ritualism to expect the realistic rather than the spiritual notions of religion. Yet this canon, otherwise favorite enough, is always sacrificed if thereby a late dating can be secured. The simplest explanation of the Psalm would be a ceremony in which the ark, that is, to all intents and purposes of actual

¹⁸ At the great Capitoline feast, on the day following the Ides, occurred the *pompa circensis*, a great procession from the temple to the circus, in which the deity must originally have been considered to participate, as the leading official drove in Jupiter's own *quadriga* as his representative. See Aust, in Roscher's *Lexicon*, col. 736 f.

¹⁹ *Origin and Religious Contents of the Psalter*, pp. 202 ff.

religion, Deity himself, moved in a procession; but this must have been before the Exile.

The other Psalm in question is the 68th. This, too, is a processional ode, but what are its liturgical connections? De Wette regards it as a commemoration of the return of the ark after a victorious war, Ewald as a song celebrating the dedication of the second temple. These commentators were feeling in the right direction, but committed the fallacy of requiring some historic event for the ode. It is really a liturgical ode celebrating an inspiring pageant in the temple, and the occasion may most plausibly be taken to be the anniversary feast of Dedication.²⁰

It is easily and somewhat airily remarked by commentators that Ps. 68 is "made up of quotations." So most incisively Duhm: "Von der Dunkelheit dieses Kunstproduktes, das hin und wieder wie ein Register von Citaten aussieht, zeugt die grosse Zahl von Deutungsversuchen." But quotations are not out of place in hymnology; Christian hymns are to a large extent made up out of quotations from the Bible, the only difference being that in this case the original meter has to be transposed into that of foreign order. Our judgment of the Psalm must depend upon discovering a clue to the use of the quotations; if these have a logical and dramatic purpose, the Psalm is more than a poetic scrapbook. Thus those obscure verses, vss. 13-14, may be plausibly explained, as has been proposed by Dr. Peters, as "the first lines" of the hymns sung in connection with the feast described.²¹ The

²⁰ A word may be said here as to the true character of such a hymn as Ps. 68. Because of its ritual references, it is supposed to have been composed for a Temple hymn. This I take to be entirely an erroneous view. It is an ode celebrating an impressive scene, but one that does not at all bear the stamp, as does Ps. 24, of having been written for ritual use. Subsequently, in the Temple worship perhaps, at all events in the Synagogue, it came to be used as a song for worship. In this it met the fortune which has been experienced by many Christian hymns which were never intended for ritual use. Some of the Psalms, *e.g.* the Hallel groups, were doubtless composed for the Temple worship; but I am inclined to think that most of them came into popular use in the conventicles, and that the Psalter is rather the Hymnal of the Synagogue than of the Temple.

²¹ J. P. Peters, *The Old Testament and the New Scholarship*, p. 224.

quotation in vss. 8 f. from the Song of Debora is likewise appropriate to a processional ode. But the most important citation is that which introduces the Psalm, the quotation from the Song to the Ark, which Moses used to utter when "the ark would set forward," to wit: "Rise up, Yahwe, and let thine enemies be scattered," etc.²² This quotation is significant as being really the text of the whole Psalm, for I must submit my opinion that the simplest understanding of the composition is that it celebrates a procession in which the ark was concerned. Or if it be not the ark, then some other realistic surrogate of Yahwe's presence must have been present. This is the most evident interpretation of such a passage as vs. 25:

"They have seen thy goings, O God,
The goings of my God, my King, in the sanctuary."

Again, a spiritualizing explanation may be offered; Deity was mystically present in the processions of the faithful. We have such a spiritualization of an elder religious realism in the epithet of Yahwe as the one "who sits the praises of Israel," Ps. 22 4, which is the mystical reflection of the primitive idea of deity riding on the thunder-clouds, — "who sits the cherubs," Ps. 80 2. Or to take Ps. 47 6,²³ "God has gone up with a shout," the expression does not require a physical interpretation, although our present argument would make such an understanding plausible. But Ps. 68 expatiates upon the progresses and processions of Yahwe, it deals with the pompous realism of the Temple cult, and it is as if we cut the nerve out of the poem to deny the realistic reference.

However, the probability of late origin presses itself upon us very much more strongly for Ps. 68 than for Ps. 24. There are certain arguments which would incline the present writer to date the Psalm, along with Duhm, in the second century. Thus the reference to Benjamin and Juda, Zebulun and Naphtali, vs. 28, can most plausibly be referred to

²² Num. 10 35.

²³ Ewald regarded this as a psalm for the consecration of the temple. It is the Proper Psalm for the New Year's ritual, and this use may be reminiscent of its earlier connection with a dedication festival.

the age when the Jews occupied Galilee. The reference to Egypt (vss. 31 ff.) can best be explained of a late age when proselytes or diplomatic Ptolemies sent sacrifices to Jerusalem. Aramaisms and late forms corroborate such historical arguments. On the other hand, Briggs finds no reason to date the Psalm later than the late Persian period, so unconvincing after all are the historical arguments; and the same commentator regards the Aramaisms and late forms as redactional.²⁴ Now when doctors disagree, we have a right to keep our views in flux and balance arguments, not tipping the scales with too much prejudice. And so, approaching the question from a different quarter, we can plausibly argue from certain expressions to an early date for the Psalm. There is the old-world reference to "the tongue of thy dogs," vs. 23, and the allusion to an antique form of ritual in vs. 26, "the maidens in the midst with the timbrels."²⁵ And still more such a verse as the 25th: "They have seen thy goings, O God," etc., can best be explained from the antique ritual of the Hebrews, rather than from the later practice of the Temple. Probably the only way in which to settle the critical problems arising about Ps. 68 is to regard it, like the *Te Deum*, as a hymn with a history, a solution that may be applied to many of its fellows. It remains, then, that ritually the Psalm can best be explained of an age when the ark was still in existence and was carried in procession in certain feasts. For a later age we would have to assume a spiritualizing interpretation of the ritual.

If Ps. 68 may be connected with the autumnal *Hag*, which may also have included the anniversary feast of the temple, we can obtain an explanation of the obscure passage, vss. 8 ff. Vss. 8, 9 refer to Yahwe's progress before his people through the wilderness, when the heavens dropped at his presence. There follows, vs. 10:

"Thou, O God, sendest [imperf.] a plentiful rain,
Thou hast confirmed [perf.] thine inheritance when it was weary."

The poet associates the God of history with the meteorological phenomena of the rain. Now in the month in which

²⁴ *Psalms* ii, p. 96.

²⁵ Read בתוך as an absolute.

the *Hag* was celebrated, the rainy season of Palestine begins, the showers coming up from the south and southwest.²⁶ We may then connect this reference to the rains with that well-known moment in the *Hag*,—at least in the later ritual—the mystic charm-rite of the water-pouring in the temple, the purpose of which doubtless was to induce a plentiful supply of rain in the coming winter.

The above presentation does not profess to offer more than a plausible argument for the celebration in early times of a dedication festival of the temple. Further light, perhaps the required proof, may come from an enlarged knowledge of ancient Semitic sanctuaries and their rituals.

²⁶ Baedeker, *Palästina*⁵, pp. xlv seq.